

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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INFO AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
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AMEMBASSY KABUL
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AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMCONSUL MADRAS
/CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 NEW DELHI 3376

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, IN
SUBJECT: HECTIC MANEUVERING CLOUDS THE POST-ELECTION
POLITICAL SCENE

REF: NEW DELHI 3199 AND NEW DELHI 3201

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY: THE PERIOD FOLLOWING THE STATE
ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS AROUND INDIA HAS BEE MARKED BY BUSY
MANEUVERING AND JOCKEYING AS POLITICIANS AND PARTIES ASSESS
THEIR RELATIVE STRENGTH AND SEEK TO ADJUST TO THE NEW
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POLITICAL EQUATION. THE SITUATION REMAINS FLUID. HURRIED
DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN LEADING FIGURES OF THE JANATA,
CONGRESS (R) AND CONGRESS(I) HAVE CONTINUED LONG INTO THE
NIGHT IN DELHI AND HAVE PRODUCED A CONFUSING, SWIFTLY
CHANGING AND SOMETIMES CONTRADICTIONARY PICTURE AS ALL THREE
MAJOR PARTIES PURSUE VARIOUS OPTIONS TO GAIN POLITICAL
ADVANTAGE OR LIMITE DAMAGE IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE ELECTIONS.

THE INCONCLUSIVE OUTCOME OF THE ELECTIONS IN MAHARASHTRA FORCED THE WHOLE QUESTION OF REALIGNMENT OF POLITICAL FORCES TO A HEAD MUCH MORE RAPIDLY THAN IT WOULD OTHERWISE HAVE BEEN OR THAT MOST OF THE MAJOR PLAYERS HAD WANTED. THE WIDE RANGE OF OPTIONS NOW UNDER DISCUSSION FOR FORMING A STABLE MINISTRY THERE HAS FOCUSSED ATTENTION ON THAT STATE. IN THIS SITUATION, SPECULATION IS RAMPANT IN DELHI, YET SEVERAL SALIENT POINTS SEEM TO HAVE EMERGED FROM THESE CROSSCURRENTS: CONGRESS (R) IS STRUGGLING TO STAY I TACT AS A VIABLE POLITICAL ENTITY. JANATA IS SEEKING TO LIMIT THE SCOPE OF MRS.GANDHI'S CHALLENGE BY PREVENTING A REUNIFICATION OF THE TWO CONGRESSES AND BY DETERING CONGRESS (R) FIGURES FROM BOLTING TO HER CAMP. MRS. GANDHI'S RECENT ACTIONS AND STATEMENTS SEEM AIMED AT MAINTAINING THE MOMENTUM OF HER PARTY'S ELECTORAL SUCCESSES AND AT FOSTERING THE BELIEF THAT SHE "IS" THE OPPOSITION. HECTIC MANEUVERING IS LIKELY TO CONTINUE FOR THE NEXT FEW DAYS. END INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY.

1. AS THE MAJOR LOSER IN THE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS, CONGRESS (R) HAS BEEN THE SCENE OF THE MOST INTENSE ACTIVITY. ITS ROUTE IN THE TWO SOUTHERN STATES AND ITS MEDIOCRE SHOWING IN MAHARASHTRA HAS PLUNGED THE REDDY/CHAVAN CONGRESS INTO DISARRAY AND DEMORALIZATION, IN A SERIES OF CRISIS MEETINGS, THE PARTY'S WORKING COMMITTEE SOUGHT TO RESOLVE THE QUESTION OF ITS STANCE VIS A VIS THE CONGRESS (I) AND CONFIDENTIAL

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THE JANATA. SOME TOF THE CONGRESS (R) LEADERSHIP QUICKLY CALLED FOR "REUNIFICATION" WITH MRS. GANDHI'S PARTY AS THE ONLY VIABLE OPTION AND AT ONE POINT THERE SEEMED

TO BE A GROWING "BOOMLET" IN THIS DIRECTION. BUT THESE UNITY MOVES WERE STRONGLY RESISTED BY SUCH DETERMINED ANTI-INDIRA LEADERS AS Y.B. CHAVAN AND DR. KARAN SINGH, AND CONSIDERATION OF REUNIFICATION SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN SHELVED -- AT LEAST FOR THE MOMENT. IRONICALLY, MRS. GANDHI HERSELF STRNGTHENED THE HANDS OF THE ANTI-UNITY FORCES WITHIN THE CONGRESS (R) BY ARROGANTLY MAKING CLEAR THAT THIS COULD OCCUR ONLY ON HER TERMS. AT A PRESS CONFERENCE ON MARCH 1 (HER FIRST FORMAL ONE SINCE THE 1977 LOK SABHA ELECTIONS), THE FORMER PM SPECIFICALLY RULED OUT THE QUESION OF REUNIFICATION AND ADAMANTLY MAINTAINED THAT "THERE IS ONLY ONE CONGRESS, OF WHICH I AM THE PRESIDENT, AND THAT CONGRESS SHOULD BE RECOGNIZED." MRS. GANDHI ALSO IMPLIED THAT CONGRESSMEN SEEKING TO MAKE AMENDS WOULD HAVE TO COME TO HER INDIVIDUALLY (PRESUMABLY ON BENDED KNEE) AND THAT SOME OF THER MOST ADAMANT OPPONENTS IN THE CONGRESS (R) WOULD NOT BE ADMITTED. (THIS POSITION WAS LATER CONFIRMED TO US BY THE LEADER OF THE CONGRESS (I)

IN THE LOK SABHA, WHO SAID THAT SUCH LEADERS AND CHAVAN, BRAHMANANDA REDDY AND KARAN SINGH " HAVE NO PLACE IN OUR PARTY.") AT THE PRESS CONFERENCE, MRS. GANDHI REMAINED UNAPOLOGETIC AND UNREPENTANT IN DEFENDING HER ACTIONS DURING THE EMERGENCY IN THE FACE OF HOSTILE QUESTIONING FROM NEWSMEN. HER DEFIANT SELF-CONFIDENT STAND APPEARS TO HAVE DASHED THE HOPEW EXPRESSED TO US BY SOME CONGRESS (R) FIGURES THAT SHE WOULD MODERATE HER ATTITUDE TO ALLOW AN EVENTUAL REUNIFICATION ON SOMETHING APPROACHING EQUAL TERMS.

2. THE CONGRESS (R) WORKING COMMITTEE ON MARCH 1 ELECTED THE MILD-MANNERED SWARAN SINGH (FORMER DEFENSE MINISTER) AS PROVISIONAL PRESIDENT TO REPLACE BRAHMANANDA REDDY. CONFIDENTIAL

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HE BRIEFLY SERVED IN THE SAME CAPACITY AFTER THE MARCH 1977 ELECTION DEBACLE. IN ADDITION, THE COMMITTEE SOUGHT TO STEM THE TIDE OF DEFECTIONS BY ISSUING A STATEMENT URGING CONGRESSMEN NOT TO BE RUSHED INTO "HASTY AND OPPORTUNISTIC DECISIONS AT THIS MOMENT OF CRISIS". THE EFFECT OF THIS APPEAL ON MANY DEMORALIZED CONGRESSMEN MAY NOT BE GREAT, BUT THE ANTICIPATED FLOOD OF DEFECTIONS HAS NOT YET TAKEN PLACE.

3. OBSERVERS HERE AGREE THAT THE INCONCLUSIVE OUTCOME OF THE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS IN MAHARASHTRA FORCED THE WHOLE QUESTION OF REALIGNMENT OF POLITICAL FORCES TO A HEAD MUCH MORE RAPIDLY THAT IT WOULD OTHERWISE HAVE BEEN, OR THAN MOST OF THE MAJOR PLAYERS HAD WISHED. INDEED, THE

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 NEW DELHI 3376

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

UNCERTAIN SITUATION IN THAT STATE HAS BECOME THE FOCUS AROUND WHICH THE ACTIVITIES OF ALL THREE MAJOR PARTIES ARE REVOLVING. CONGRESS(R) FORCES IN MAHARASHTRA, THOUGH WINNING ONLY 69 SEATS, SEEM DETERMINED TO RETURN TO POWER THERE AT ANY COST. SEVERAL OPTIONS ARE OPEN TO THEM AND FORMER CHIEF MINISTER VASANTRAO PATIL AND HIS COLLEAGUES HAVE BEEN BUSILY TRYING THEM OUT IN MEETINGS WITH THE 1 LEADERSHIP OF ALL THREE PARTIES. WE HEAR THAT ONE OPTION, A COALITION CONGRESS(R)/JANATA GOVERNMENT, HAS BEEN REJECTED BY THE CONGRESS(R) WORKING COMMITTEE. ANOTHER POSSIBILITY, A NATIONAL REUNIFICATION OF THE TWO CONGRESSES
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(WHICH WOULD ALLOW THE CREATION OF A REUNIFIED CONGRESS MINISTRY), HAS BEEN SHELVED. THERE IS ALSO SPECULATION THAT THE MAHARASHTRA CONGRESS(R) MIGHT BYPASS THE PARTY'S NATIONAL LEADERSHIP ALTOGETHER AND MAKE A SEPARATE PEACE WITH MRS. GANDHI UNDER WHICH THEY WOULD RETURN TO HER FOLD EN MASSE AND TOGETHER WITH THE CONGRESS(I) LEGISLATORS FORM A GOVERNMENT IN THE STATE. ACCORDING TO THE CONGRESS(I) LEADER IN THE LOC SABHA, ANOTHER OPTION, A COALITION GOVERNMENT OF THE TWO SEPARATE CONGRESS PARTIES, HAS BEEN FIRMLY REJECTED BY THE CONGRES(I) LEADERSHIP. (THIS CONGRESS(I) LEADER NOTED TO AN EMBOFF THAT MRS. GANDHI'S PARTY IS IN NO HURRY TO TRY TO FORM A GOVERNMENT IN MAHARASHTRA. HE HINTED THAT THE CONGRESS(I) MAY PREFER TO AWAIT THE COLLAPSE OF WHATEVER PATCHWORK MINISTRY MAY EMERGE AND THEN MOUNT A STRONG, WELL-FINANCED CAMPAIGN IN THE NEW ELECTIONS WHICH COULD FOLLOW. HE EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE THAT WITH MRS. GANDHI CONCENTRATING ON THAT ONE STATE "WE WILL SWEEP THE POLLS.") CONGEN BOMBAY TENDS TO

DISCOUNT SPECULATION OF A JOINT CONGRESS MINISTRY IN MAHARASHTRA (BY WHATEVER MEANS THIS COULD BE ACHIEVED) ON THE GROUNDS THAT BETWEEN THEM THE TWO CONGRESSES DO NOT HAVE ENOUGH SEATS FOR A STABLE MAJORITY. IN ADDITION, PERSONAL ANIMOSITIES BETWEEN THE TWO PARTIES WOULD MAKE ANY SUCH JOINT UNDERTAKING DIFFICULT TO CREATE AND OPERATE. DESPITE THIS, AND THE NEGATIVE CONGRESS(I) POSITION REPORTED ABOVE, THE CONGRESS(R) PARLIAMENTARY BOARD TODAY AUTHORIZED MAHARASHTRA LEADERS OF THE PARTY TO HOLD DISCUSSION WITH CONGRESS(I) LEADERS ON A WORKING ARRANGEMENT FOR FORMATION OF A GOVERNMENT IN THE STATE.

4. THE JANATA HAS INJECTED ITSELF INTO THE JOCKEYING IN MAHARASHTRA. THE RULING PARTY SEEMS TO BE PURSUING TWO CONFLICTING OPTIONS SIMULTANEOUSLY, PRESUMABLY IN THE CONFIDENTIAL

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HOPE THAT ONE OR THE OTHER WILL PAY OFF. AS THE PARTY WITH THE LARGEST NUMBER OF SEATS IN THE ASSEMBLY (99), IT WOULD OBVIOUSLY LIKE TO FORM ITS OWN GOVERNMENT THERE WITH THE SUPPORT OF ITS ELECTORAL ALLIES (CPM, PWP AND SEVERAL MINOR GROUPS), INDEPENDENTS AND SOME CONGRESS DEFECTORS. THESE MINISTRY-MAKING EFFORTS ARE CURRENTLY UNDER WAY. WE UNDERSTAND THAT PRIME MINISTER DESAI TOLD THE BRITISH HIGH COMMISSIONER YESTERDAY THAT JANATA IS SEEKING TO FORM A GOVERNMENT IN MAHARASHTRA AND THAT HE DESAI) THINKS THAT THE PARTY MIGHT WOO "JUST ENOUGH" SUPPORT TO DO SO. YET, AT THE SAME TIME, JANATA'S VITAL OBJECTIVE TO PRESERVE THE CONGRESS(R) AS A VIABLE PARTY AND TO PREVENT ITS ABSORPTION INTO MRS. GANDHI'S PARTY MAY BE LEADING THE JANATA IN ANOTHER DIRECTION. VARIOUS POSSIBILITIES ARE APPARENTLY BEING PURSUED. THESE INCLUDE: JANATA SUPPORT FROM THE OUTSIDE OF A MINORITY CONGRESS(R) GOVERNMENT, A JANATA/CONGRESS(R) COALITION GOVERNMENT HEADED BY OUTGOING CHIEF MINISTER PATIL, AND A COALITION MINISTRY BETWEEN JANATA AND A SEGMENT OF THE STATE CONGRESS(R) TO BE LED BY A CONGRESS(R) FIGURE. THESE POSSIBILITIES ARE APPARENTLY BEING DANGLED IN FRONT OF THE CONGRESS(R) TO FORESTALL ITS COALESCING WITH CONGRESS(I). JANATA GENERAL SECRETARY MADHU LIMAYE TOLD US THAT HE SAW SUCH ARRANGEMENTS BETWEEN JANATA AND CONGRESS(R) AS INITIAL STEPS LEADING ULTIMATELY TO A MERGER BETWEEN THE TWO PARTIES. WE ALSO UNDERSTAND THAT THERE IS UNITY WITHIN JANATA RANKS ON THIS ISSUE AND THAT EVEN THOSE ELEMENTS WHO WERE EARLIER RELUCTANT TO COURT CONGRESSMEN NOW BELIEVE THAT THE THREAT OF A REUNIFIED CONGRESS UNDER MRS. GANDHI IS SUCH THAT THEY ARE WILLING TO ACCEPT A CONGRESS(R) CHIEF MINISTER IN MAHARASHTRA. (IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER JANATA LEGISLATORS IN THE STATE WILL FEEL LIKEWISE AND AGREE TO

FOREGO THE CHANGE OF FORMING A GOVERNMENT OF THEIR OWN.)

5. FINAL FIGURES FROM ASSAM ALSO PRODUCED AN INCONCLUSIVE
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OUTCOME. JANATA WON 53 OF THE 126 SEATS IN THE ASSEMBLY, CONGRESS(R) 26, CPM 11, CONGRESS(I) EIGHT, CPI FIVE, RCPI (AN ALLY OF THE CPM) FOUR, OTHER PARTIES SEVEN AND INDEPENDENTS 12. JANATA APPARENTLY IS GOING AHEAD WITH EFFORTS TO FORM A GOVERNMENT WITH THE SUPPORT OF ITS ALLIES AND FROM SOME INDEPENDENTS AND CONGRESS DEFECTORS. GIVEN THE CONSERVATIVE NATURE OF MANY JANATA LEADERS IN ASSAM, IT MAY TRY TO AVOID RELIANCE ON CPM SUPPORT. CONGEN CALCUTTA BELIEVES THAT THE POSSIBILITY OF CONGRESS(R) ENTERING A JANATA-LEAD COALITION MAY DEPEND UPON THE OUTCOME OF THE CURRENT MANEUVERING IN MAHARASHTRA.

6. NO PARTY WON A MAJORITY IN REMOTE MEGHALAYA. CONGRESS HAS 20 SEATS, THE TWO TRIBALLY-ORIENTED PARTIES GETTING 16 AND 14 RESPECTIVELY, AND TEN GOING TO INDEPENDENTS. ALL THE NON-CONGRESS GROUPS MAY TRY TO FORM A COALITION GOVERNMENT.

7. BUT THE PROBLEMS OF THE NORTHEASTERN STATES HAVE TAKEN A DISTINCT BACK SEAT TO THE SITUATION IN MAHARASHTRA. HOW THE PROBLEM OF GOVERNMENT FORMATION THERE IS ULTIMATELY RESOLVED MAY WELL SET THE PATTERN FOR THE FUTURE COURSE OF POLITICAL ALIGNMENTS IN INDIA. THE OUTCOME IS FAR FROM CLEAR BUT ALL THE PLAYERS SEEM TO REALIZE THAT THE STAKES ARE HIGH.
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